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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 002674

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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON FIRST WOMEN MUNICIPAL COUNCIL MEMBERS

REF: A. KUWAIT 2509

[1](#)B. KUWAIT 2416

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment: Earlier this month, the GOK appointed six members to the 16-person Municipal Council, including, for the first time, two women: engineers Shaykha Fatima bint Nasser Al-Sabah and Fawziya Al-Bahar. The appointments represented a historic first step for women's political empowerment in the wake of the May 16 legislation granting women full political rights. The Ambassador met with the women during congratulatory calls June 14 and 15. Both had modest goals for their Council participation, and focused on environmental and urban management issues. They bring considerable technical expertise to the Council, but no political experience and neither expressed any ambition to use Council membership as a political springboard to higher political posts. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)2. (SBU) During a June 14 congratulatory call on one of the two newly-elected female Municipal Council members, Shaykha Fatima told the Ambassador that she and Fawziya Al-Bahar may face challenges from their male Council member counterparts given the traditional views of women's political participation. She added, however, that she will work hard to convince the men otherwise. She described the Municipal Council as an octopus with tentacles in many aspects of Kuwaiti administration. One area of concern that she hopes the Council will address is the environment since, as she described, Kuwaitis lack formal education in such issues, thereby creating a culture of disregard for the environment. She told the press shortly after being appointed, that although the Council is a technical institution, she would not hesitate to use her position to support women's issues.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Fawziya Al-Bahar told the Ambassador, on June 15, that she was surprised to be chosen as a member of the Council. She explained that every minister provided the resumes of their top people for consideration for the appointed posts, and only six out of 1000 were chosen. She expressed confidence in the growth of the women's movement in Kuwait. Saying that a good engineering education could be obtained in Kuwait, she lamented that most young Kuwaiti women are more concerned about clothes than politics or engineering. She stated that the overall number of female engineers is growing relative to men and there is a significant number of women engineers already working in various ministries.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Al-Bahar further stated that one of her priorities for her work on the Council is to beautify Kuwait. She said that when she looks at the UAE she feels "jealous" because she wants Kuwait to look as good as the Emirates. She highlighted the need for private companies to get involved saying that their participation is integral to the success of improving Kuwait.

[1](#)5. (U) Bio note: Shaykha Fatima bint Nasser Al-Sabah, 52, is an engineer and until her appointment to the Council, she served for 14 years as the Assistant Undersecretary for Engineering Affairs at the Amiri Diwan. She earned her B.S. in architectural engineering from Catholic University in Washington D.C. Before her work in the Diwan, she served as the manager of the Engineering Department in the Office of Planning at the Public Works Ministry. From 1991-1992 she served as a member of the Kuwait Emergency Rebuilding Team and with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. She is the sister of former Minister and Ambassador to the U.S. Shaykh Saud Nasser Al-Sabah and is the first of two wives to Shaykh Mohammed Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah (brother of Dr. Rasha Al-Sabah); they have one daughter, Anud. Her husband's grandfather was Amir Shaykh Jabir II (1915-1917).

[1](#)6. (U) Bio note: Fawziya bint Mohammed Ahmed AbdelRahman Al-Bahar, who wears the hijab, became Kuwait's first female engineer after receiving her Bachelor's degree in engineering from the University of Cairo in 1973. During the same year, she joined the Ministry of Electricity as a trainee and, in 1975, the Ministry sent her on a scholarship to the U.S. to begin a Master's program in engineering at the University of Kentucky, which she completed in 1978. She spent a total of

29 years working as an engineer in the Ministry of Electricity and Water. (Note: The Ministries of Electricity and Oil were consolidated into the Energy Ministry in 2003. End Note.) She spent the majority of her professional career working on desalination, including service in a senior post as manager of the Technical Oversight Department in the Office of the Assistant Undersecretary.

17. (U) Bio note: Of Al-Bahar's six siblings, two are doctors and the rest are engineers. Al-Bahar, who is in her mid-50s, has four children, two of whom have completed university studies. She cites her mother, who dropped out of secondary school, as the driving force behind her family's academic success.

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